

Administration of Barack Obama, 2015

**Remarks at the House Democratic Issues Conference in Philadelphia,
Pennsylvania**

January 29, 2015

The President. Hey! Hello, hello, hello! Hello, Democrats! Hey! Thank you so much. Thank you. Everybody, sit down, sit down. It's good to be with you, Democrats. It's good to be in Philadelphia. My understanding is, we still have our host, Mayor Nutter, here. Where's Mayor Nutter? There he is right there.

I want to just remind the New England and Pacific Northwest contingents, this is the City of Brotherly Love. So regardless of what you think about Sunday, I want you all to keep it clean. *[Laughter]* The—I am not taking sides on that one. *[Laughter]* I want to begin by—oh, bring your own footballs— that was—ooh. *[Laughter]* Ooh.

Audience members. Oooh—

The President. Wow. *[Laughter]*

Audience member. That's not overinflated.

The President. This is—and you're, what, a Giants fan?

Audience member. Jets fan.

The President. See, that's why he's so resentful. *[Laughter]*

I—let me begin by just acknowledging your outstanding leadership, starting with someone who, somehow, can travel for 17 hours, come off the plane perfectly coiffed—*[laughter]*—not a wrinkle on her, happy as a clam—*[laughter]*—come back another 17 hours later, after 2½, 3 days of programs, and go straight to a retreat of her caucus, and never miss a beat. I don't know what she drinks along with that chocolate. *[Laughter]* But I want some of it. Your outstanding leader, Nancy Pelosi. Give Nancy a big round of applause. *[Applause]* Hey!

Joe Crowley also went on that trip and didn't look perfectly coifed when he got off the plane. *[Laughter]* But give Joe Crowley a big round of applause also. I want to thank Steny for the gracious introduction; Xavier, who helped obviously make this happen and is just providing outstanding leadership all the time; Jim Clyburn, one of my favorite people, just an extraordinary gentleman and leader. We love him. And Debbie Wasserman Shultz, our chairwoman of the DNC. Thank you so much.

And then, the guy who I had a chance to see before I came out just to let him know that he should not feel overly disappointed when his hair gets gray, because in this job it will—Ben Ray Luján, the DCCC chair. I used to be youthful and attractive like him. *[Laughter]* We'll see how long that lasts, brother. *[Laughter]* He's going to have hair like Steve Israel. *[Laughter]*

I'm not going to give a long speech because I just gave one, and I want to spend most of the time on questions. Let me summarize then what I said last week.

We have been through an extraordinarily challenging journey, worst financial crisis in our lifetimes. We've seen the incredible courage and sacrifice, but also the costs of two difficult wars. There's been ups and downs in every region of the country and people feeling as if the economy is churning in ways that defy their control. And yet, despite all the challenges, despite

all the fears, despite all the difficulties, over the last 6 years, what we've seen is the American people fighting their way back. And because of them, because of their resilience and their grit and their hard work, and because you and I, together, made some really tough choices—some sometimes politically unpopular choices—America has come back.

We've seen 11 million jobs created, best job growth since the nineties, best job growth in manufacturing since the nineties; steepest drop in the unemployment rate in 30 years; deficit cut by two-thirds; over 10 million people with health insurance that didn't have it before. We've seen reading scores go up, high school graduation rates go up, more young people attending college than ever before. We're number one in oil production, number one in natural gas production; doubled clean energy production; solar power up tenfold; wind power up threefold; carbon pollution down.

There is no economic metric by which we are not better off than when I took office. And that is because of the extraordinary will and dedication of the American people, but also because all of you have done a terrific job. And I'm proud of you for that.

Now, what we also know is, we've now got some choices to make. Going forward, are we going to be an economy in which a few do spectacularly well, or are we going to be an economy in which everybody who's willing to work hard is getting a fair shot and can succeed? Are we going to be an economy that continues to invest in innovation and infrastructure, all the ingredients that are necessary to power this economy through the 21st century, or are we going to be neglectful of those very things that have made us an economic superpower? Are we going to do what's necessary to make sure that everybody gets the tools they need to succeed—the education, the childcare support, the help when it comes to minimum wages and paid sick leave—that gives people a basic baseline of stability, but also allows them to constantly adapt to an ever-changing world?

That's the set of choices that we now have to make. And because the economy has gotten better, wages are beginning to tick up, people are starting to feel better about the economy. But I think what everybody here understands is that the ground that middle class families lost over the last 30 years still has to be made up and the trends that have squeezed middle class families and those striving to get into the middle class, those trends have not been fully reversed.

And so as much as we should appreciate the progress that's been made, it shouldn't be a cause for complacency, because we've got more work to do. We've got a lot more work to do. And in my State of the Union, I laid out a series of specific proposals that would allow us to continue to control our deficit, but would also ensure that we were investing in the kind of quality education, including free community college, that is so necessary for people to move forward. Specific proposals to make sure that we provided some relief to middle class families in the form of a childcare credit and additional higher education credits so that somebody who is working hard and doing their best can get a little bit of relief, a little bit of help.

We talked about how important it is for us to rebuild our infrastructure in this country and put people back to work all across the country, something that everybody knows we need to do. And we've got very specific ways of paying for it, by closing loopholes that send jobs overseas and rewarding companies who are investing right here in the United States of America.

So I summarized all this as middle class economics. And what we know is, middle class economics works. That's been the history of this country. That's been the history of the last 6 years when we've implemented middle class economics. And the other side was telling us this

would be a disaster and it would kill jobs and raise the deficit, health care costs would explode. And none of that happened. That's pretty rare where you have two visions, a vigorous debate, and then, you test who's right. And the record shows that we were right and middle class economics does work.

So the bottom line is this: We've got to make sure it continues to work. We should protect the progress we're making.

I hear Republicans are holding their 50th or 60th vote next year [week]* to repeal or undermine the Affordable Care Act. I've lost count at this point. But here's something easy to remember: If that bill ever actually reached my desk, I would happily veto it. If they try to unravel new rules that we put in place to make sure Wall Street recklessness doesn't hurt American families again, I'll be happy to veto it. If, rather than try to solve the problem of a broken immigration system, they compound the problem, I'll veto it.

But my hope is that they join us. And one good piece of news is I noticed that even though their policies haven't quite caught up yet, their rhetoric is starting to sound pretty Democratic. [Laughter] I heard—Chris Van Hollen was telling me about one Republican Senator who shall go unnamed, but generally, doesn't agree with me on much, and he was suddenly shocked, shocked that the top 1 percent is doing really well and everybody else is getting squeezed, and we need to do something about it. And I think—I welcome that. I consider imitation the highest form of flattery. Come on board. Let's go help out that middle class family. Let's get something done.

We've got a former Presidential candidate on the other side who suddenly is just deeply concerned about poverty. [Laughter] That's great! Let's go! Come on! Let's do something about it!

I am glad that their rhetoric at least has shifted, but let's now make sure that the policies match up with the rhetoric. Let's make sure Americans are able to upgrade their skills for higher wages. Let's build the world's most competitive economy. Let's make sure that we end this across-the-board sequester that doesn't differentiate between smart Government spending and dumb Government spending. Let's take a scalpel and not a meat cleaver, and let's make sure that we're funding the things that we know help American families succeed. That's a smart thing to do.

I disagree with any Republican who says letting funding for the Department of Homeland Security lapse is "not the end of the world." That's a quote from one of them. I mean, I tell you, these are the guys who are always saying they're concerned about the borders. These are the folks who say they're concerned about terrorism. Well, who do you think helps monitor our borders? Well, what do you mean, it's not at the end of the world? That's all you've been talking about. And now, suddenly, because you want to make a political point, you think that we can afford to have the Department of Homeland Security not functioning, because of political games in Washington?

I mean, we can pay for all of the proposals that I put forward in the State of the Union we can pay for by fixing a Tax Code that is riddled with loopholes for special interests. And if Republicans don't agree with my approach for paying for it, then they should put forward their own proposals. And I'm happy to engage them on that. I'm eager to engage with them on that. I think it's entirely fair for them to say, that's not the right way to fund higher education, that's

* White House correction.

not the right way to help families with childcare. And we can have a good, healthy debate. What we can't suggest is that childcare is not important to American families or that higher education costs are not relevant to folks who are currently in the middle class or trying to work their way into the middle class or hoping their children will be able to get in the middle class. Those things are important. So put forward alternatives.

And the good news is, is that I think there are some who want to work with us. And maybe the fact that I've now run my last election means that, instead of just blocking what we're trying to do, they may be interested in getting some stuff done. Of course, they'll then spend all their time attacking the next Democrat coming down the pike, but that's okay.

Because, ultimately, what this is about, the reason we are here, the reason so many of you make such extraordinary sacrifices—and your families make sacrifices—to be here, is because the story of the people that I mentioned in the State of the Union—people like Rebekah, who I talked about, from Minnesota—those people are us. They're our moms and our dads and our aunts and our uncles and our nephews and our cousins and our neighbors and our coworkers and our friends. And we remember some point in time where somebody gave us a little bit of a hand up. And we remember that scholarship that allowed us to go to school when it wasn't clear that our family might be able to afford it. And we remember what it was like to try to find childcare when you got two folks working and trying to pay the mortgage at the same time, just like Michelle and I had to do. We remember those things.

And the reason that we do this is so that those folks have the same extraordinary opportunities in the same extraordinary country as we did. And more importantly, so that our children and our grandchildren and our great-grandchildren have those same opportunities. And it is our obligation to make sure that we are crystal clear about what we stand for and who we are fighting for.

And I will just say, obviously, we were all disappointed with the outcome of the last election, and there are a lot of reasons for it, and I'm happy to take on some of the blame. But one thing I'm positive about is, when we're shy about what we care about, when we're defensive about what we've accomplished, when we don't stand up straight and proud and say, yes, we believe that everybody in this country should have health insurance, and we're glad that we are making that happen; yes, we believe that families shouldn't be torn apart, and we're glad that we're fighting for immigration reform; yes, we believe in middle class economics, and we don't apologize for wanting to make sure that some wonderful young man or young woman out there can actually afford to go to college even if their parents didn't go—we need to stand up and go on offense and not be defensive about what we believe in. That's why we're Democrats.

And I promise you, I'm not going out the last 2 years sitting on the sidelines. I am going to be out there making the case every single day, and I hope you join me.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:34 p.m. at the Sheraton Philadelphia Society Hill Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Reps. Steny H. Hoyer, Xavier Becerra, and Mario Diaz-Balart; W. Mitt Romney, 2012 Republican Presidential nominee; and St. Anthony, MN, resident, Rebekah Erler.

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